

"It's fun to study history...it fills you in on the stuff you missed."

9th Grader, Webutuck

Amenia Historical Society

...what was old is new again

APRIL 2008

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MILTON BRASHER TO SPEAK TO AMENIA HISTORICAL GROUP

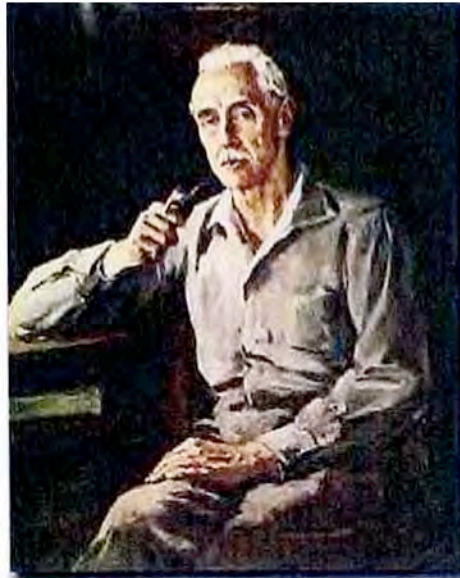
Amenia Historical Society will meet on Tuesday, May 12, at 8 p.m. at the Wassale Firehouse. Milton E. Brasher will bring original pictures by Rex Brasher and give a talk on them.
The meeting is open to all.

..History repeats itself (see page 2)

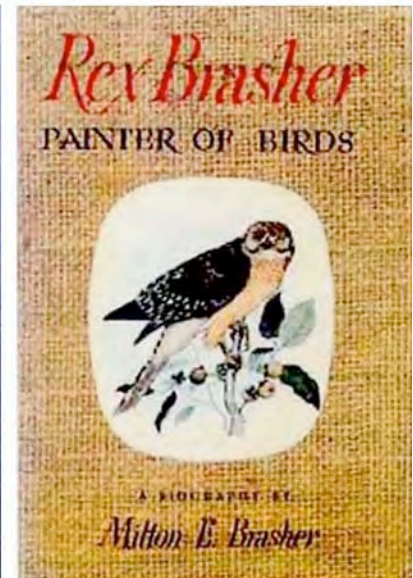
- The Birdman of Bog Hollow
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- The Bear Lady of "Bug Hollow"
- Remembering Sherm Chase, Inventor
- Lucia Comins – a lady and an artist
- VISIT THE NEW AHS DOWN-TOWN ARCHIVE OFFICE
TUES. – THURS. 2-4 pm
Suite B, behind K.J.'s

The Birdman of Bog Hollow

by Debbie Brasher



Portrait by Harry Waltman, 1934



It was as a young man that Rex Brasher, America's premier painter of birds, began 30 years of travels throughout the country studying and capturing on paper the native birds of North America, pursuing an intense interest that had developed in him as a teenager.

Then in 1912 he settled down on his 125 acre farm beginning just below the mountain on Bog Hollow Road, the property straddling the line between America and Kent, Ct. Here at 'Chickadee Valley' he began seriously painting from his bird sketches completing 874 master watercolors that were to comprise his original paintings. These were later turned into 12-volume sets of books entitled *The Birds and Trees of North America*. This collection of well over 800 paintings included more than 3000 separate bird figures in their natural settings. This was a much greater body of work than the 435 watercolor paintings, which were the lifetime production of John James Audubon. It is interesting to note that Rex Brasher made all his studies of live birds, whereas Audubon used stuffed specimens.

Born in Brooklyn in 1869, Brasher was a self-taught artist who twice burned hundreds of his early works as "not good enough." However, his field sketches and notes were preserved, enabling him to start over on his classic collection.

History repeats..

While working in the archives, in a folder of press releases from the 1970's, we were astonished to find a this clipping about a planned AHS meeting.

Milton E. Brasher was Rex Brasher's nephew, the son of Rex Brasher's younger brother. He wrote a biography about his uncle entitled *Rex Brasher Painter of Birds*. We have no idea what he told the America Historical Society about his famous relative.

Was anyone at that particular meeting

Nature notes:

Bog Hollow is actually a true bog - that being defined as a spring-fed acidic lake in which masses of vegetation float on the water's surface. There are several rare plant species in Bog Hollow, namely Swamp Thistle, Leather Leaf and Sundew. The rare Pinesap plant grows there as well.

For the many bird watchers who live in the Hollow, the most unusual birds are the Hermit Thrush and the Eastern Wood Pewee.

How about a blue spotted salamander?

Rex Brasher's interest in birds was inspired by his father, a Wall Street broker by profession, but an amateur ornithologist and a taxidermist by avocation. The young Brasher, determined to study birds in their natural surroundings, made his first trip down the east coast from Maine to Florida, financed by working as a photo engraver. His future travels were supported by betting on horses, and by various labors, including road building, painting houses, and even a job on a fishing boat – the kind with the tall masts and sails that went far out to sea. Rex also had a great love for the sea; it was his second great love in the natural world. This job on the fishing boat enabled him to learn of shore and sea birds.

On his trip to the Midwest and Pacific coast he traveled by train and on foot, often walking the countryside for months. He would periodically mail home his sketches and notes.

When he decided to reproduce his master paintings, he found the costs of mass printing in color prohibitive. He chose to hand-color black and white prints of his paintings, limiting his number of 12-volume sets to 100. Using a system of stencils and an air brush, Brasher, kin, and friends in the area produced nearly 90,000 Brasher watercolors over four years.

Rex Brasher died at 91 at the home of his long-time friend Dorothy Newton, in Gaylordsville, Connecticut, a few miles south of his Chickadee Valley farm.

Research: John Quinn

The Benton Farm in Sinpatch



The World Peace Sanctuary now occupies the site of the old Benton Farm. The "old Homestead" still stands. The grove of trees planted by Bill Benton has reached maturity, and the site of the old well is one of the landmarks of the Sanctuary grounds. Originally a dairy farm, Bill lost his workers to the construction of the new State School (now Taconic DDSO) and changed to chicken farming and then raising nut trees. Many of his trees were planted on the new State School grounds. *(photo courtesy of Reed Benton)*

More Bog Hollow Residents:

The Critters

Just talk to “The Bear Lady”, Pat Kelsey, and it becomes clear that the wildlife residents are far more numerous than anyone would suspect.

Pat and Clarence Kelsey moved to Bog Hollow Road some 50 years ago, and immediately Pat was delighted with the numbers and varieties of birds coming in the area. She feeds them all, but draws the line when the bears show up at her feeder. The first bear tore down the feeding stations and bent the poles in the process. He could not be chased away. In fact he was so bold that he would lie on his stomach with the broken bird feeder between his paws, eating all he wanted while staring at her as she watched from her window. The next year two bears with tags showed up and destroyed more bird feeders. Soon, Pat became known as “The Bear Lady”.

Everyone hears the coyotes at night, and has seen a wide variety of animals, reptiles and birds. Deer do quite a bit of damage to gardens and shrubs. Peg Thompson has seen otter down in the lake and beaver too. There are rattlesnakes up on the mountain that come down when it is very dry, but they usually stay away from people's yards. However, one of Miriam Devine's first wildlife encounters was with a rattlesnake that her cats surrounded out in the yard. She had to summon two neighbors to solve that problem.

Bog Hollow – a Long, Lonely Road

At one time, the settlement of Sinpatch could have been called a hamlet since there was a mill, school and store. Bog Hollow, on the other hand, is simply a long, lonely road, in fact an ancient Indian trail, running through a narrow, heavily forested, and sparsely settled valley from New York State to Connecticut.

There were never any traditional institutions of a hamlet in Bog Hollow - no store, church, mill or post office. The houses, even today, are widely spaced. Peg Thompson, who lives in Bog Hollow now with husband Ken, remembers that almost the only gathering place was the Bog Hollow Inn - a place noted for its good food and drink, especially popular with Kent folks when theirs was a dry town. Under the ownership of Eddie Doll and later Bill Snyder the Inn was a popular place especially on “pay night” (Friday) when everyone in the hollow went there for dinner. Unfortunately, it burned in the 1990's.

Up the road Sherm Chase built a large lodge, but it never served liquor or had guests. There were popular square dances there every Saturday night, however. Nearby neighbors like Peg and Ken Thompson, sat out on their porches and could easily hear the music from the dance. Shirley Gregory and her late husband “Red” were friends of “Van” Van Deusen who had purchased the lodge on spec from Chase. Shirley recalls that the interior of the lodge was all done in knotty pine. The Van Deusens, from Maine as was “Red” Gregory, had an apartment on the second floor. Having fallen into disrepair over the years, the lodge today is only a foundation.

Although there are many new houses in Bog Hollow now, the homes are scattered along the highway. Rarely do residents socialize with their neighbors. For those living alone or in poor health, there is quite a sense of isolation. Shirley Gregory frequently drove some of the elderly housebound neighbors to doctors' appointments or to Kent to do some grocery shopping. There was Edith Wallace, Herb and Marie Kenzelman, and Lillian “Lil the Pill” (her own nick name for herself) Booth.

Other Residents of Bog Hollow

Rex Brasher, our “20th century Audubon”, was not the only artist to live in Bog Hollow. The noted contemporary sculptor Peter Woytuk resided and worked there. Of world-wide fame, his public sculptures of animals are seen in Kent and around the world, and his smaller works are in many collections.

Loved and respected by all who knew her, Lucia Comins and her friend Matilda (“Til”) Garvey celebrated the beautiful landscapes and abundant wildlife of the area. Lucia's paintings and carvings are in many local homes to this day. Lucia was always pleasant and kind, folks say. Next door, Kay Robinson, teacher and garden enthusiast, encouraged many neighbors to have gardens. They say her gardens were “works of art”.

Amenia Historical
Society

PO Box 22

Amenia, NY 12501

Mark your calendar:

MAY 4th at 2 pm

Program on Sinpatch,
Bog Hollow and Rex
Brasher, Bird Artist

World Peace Sanctuary

Co-sponsored by the Kent, CT,
and Ameniam Historical Societies
And the World Peace Prayer
Society

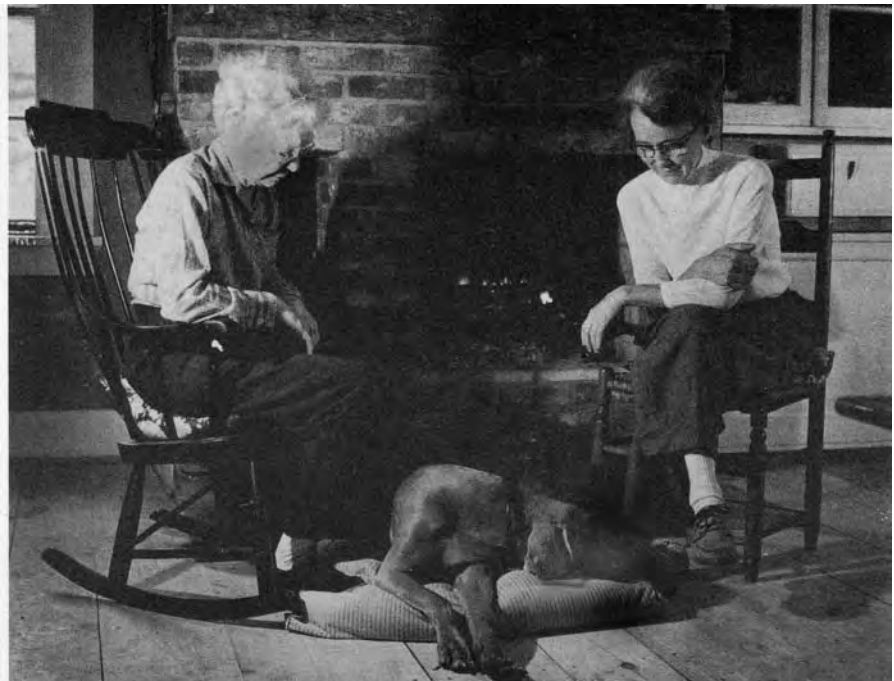
*Thanks for help on this issue
to: Debbie Brasher, John
Quinn, Peg & Ken
Thompson, Shirley Gregory,
Pat Kelsey, Miriam Devine,
Reed Benton, Ken Hoadley,
Betsy Strauss and the Kent
Historical Society.*

Contact Us

AmeniaHistorical@aol.com

Matilda Garvey and Lucia Comins (right) spend a quiet evening by the fire at home in Bog Hollow. They were likely planning a sketching trip for the next day.

Photo provided by Shirley Gregory



Sherm Chase ... Man of Inventions

If you live in Kent, you know the name. If you have ever lived in Bog Hollow, you probably knew the man, and you may even live in one of the houses he built.

He was a lumberman, builder and land speculator, but most interesting is that he was a true Yankee inventor. He developed a wind wheel (not a windmill), a waste oil heater, a device to keep logs from splitting when cut into railroad ties, and a method to remove pollutants from coal when it was used as a fuel. But he is best known for building pre-fabricated houses in Bog Hollow. He built the walls in his shop and assembled the house on site. Many of those homes are lived in today, undergoing additions and changes over the last 60 years.

A lumberman by trade, Chase had lost part of one leg in a sawmill accident and constructed his own wooden leg, making adjustments and improvements to the prosthesis over the years. He built a dam and dredged the bog to create a lake off Bog Hollow road. He also constructed log cabins

for the hunt club on Preston Mountain and built the lodge in Bog Hollow.

In his later years, Chase worked to get his inventions accepted and financed. Surprisingly, he also wrote poetry and left a considerable record of his memories when he passed away in 1982.



Sherm Chase and his invention from the Lakeville Journal, January 17, 1980

For more info on SHERM CHASE, contact kenthistoricalsociety@juno.com or call Marge at 860-927-4587

CALENDAR of EVENTS

Sunday, April 27th – 1 -5 pm Hyde Park Historical Society invites us all to a **“Eleanor Roosevelt Knit-In” at the FDR Library** to knit or crochet 7” x 9” squares for a “Warm up America” project. Call 845-229-2559 for info or write to Patsy Costello at Patsy97@aol.com fee: \$15

Sunday, May 4th – 2-4 pm Amenia and Kent Historical Societies with the World Peace Prayer Society invite everyone to a talk on **Sinpatch, Bog Hollow and Rex Brasher, famous bird artist**. Come at 1:30 for a walk around the Peace Sanctuary with Jim. No fee, Bring a lawnchair, AHS members please bring cookies.

Saturday, June 14th – 10am – 2 pm Stop by and visit the AHS table at Amenia’s **Strawberry Fair**. AHS will be selling books and postcards of Amenia. **To volunteer at the table, call Arlene Iuliano 845-373-9088.**